



Heritage and Wild Trout Programs



The **Wild Trout Program** was established in 1971 when the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) adopted a policy to manage designated streams and lakes exclusively for wild, naturally-produced trout. Wild Trout waters are intended to provide the angler with an opportunity to fish in aesthetically pleasing, environmentally productive streams or lakes having trout populations whose numbers and sizes are largely unaffected by angling. Wild Trout waters are managed principally by protecting, maintaining, and restoring habitat, and through appropriate angling regulations. Hatchery-produced strains of wild or semi-wild trout may be used to augment populations if necessary, but no domesticated strains of catchable-sized trout may be planted in Wild Trout waters. Management by the California Department of Fish and Game (Department) is guided by written management plans which identify actions and policies necessary to protect trout habitat and maintain or enhance trout populations in designated waters. As of January 1999, 29 stream segments (total 766 miles) and three lakes (total 81.2 acres) have been designated as Wild Trout waters.

Wild Trout Program waters include some of the state's finest trout fishing. The program manages a variety of wild trout fisheries, from the premier northern California "spring creeks," including Hat Creek and Fall River, to challenging "tailwater" fisheries such as the Lower Owens and Middle Fork Stanislaus rivers, and remote, west-slope Sierra Nevada canyon streams including the Middle Fork Feather, Rubicon, and Upper Kings rivers. Recently, emphasis has been placed on adding "fast-action" streams like the Middle Fork San Joaquin River.

The passage of the Trout and Steelhead Conservation and Management Planning Act of 1979 (Act) added an aspect to the program which encourages catch-and-release fishing practices. Trout streams and lakes designated, pursuant to the Act, are managed with a zero-, one-, or two-trout daily bag limit — the Act's unique definition of catch-and-release regulations. The law promotes the use of minimum or maximum size limits and gear restrictions (such as artificial lures and barbless hooks) where appropriate. The program's management responsibilities grow annually, because the Act requires that the Department recommend at least 25 new miles of stream and one additional lake to the Commission for catch-and-release regulations each year. As of January 1999, a total of 38 stream segments (total 416.15 miles) and 19 lakes (total 6,929.2 acres) have been designated as *Catch-and-Release* waters.

The Department's Wild Trout staff consists of two statewide biologists, one supervisor, and one biologist from each of the six inland geographical regions. In addition, the program coordinates a statewide stream survey crew consisting of several scientific aides. This team conducts the bulk of Wild Trout resource assessment, monitoring, and evaluation work supported by other Department field biologists, cooperating agencies, and volunteers. Program staff are responsible for: (1) conducting a statewide inventory of trout streams and lakes, and collection of habitat data on selected trout waters having potential for wild trout and/or catch-and-release management; (2) identifying candidate wild trout and/or catch-and-release waters; and (3) assessing the effects of angling on these populations. Trout waters may be evaluated by means of fish population surveys (electrofishing or direct observations), and/or angler surveys (creel surveys or angler survey boxes). The Department uses this information to develop specific recommendations to the Commission about designating specific candidate waters for wild trout and/or catch-and-release management, and adoption of any special regulations needed to improve or protect important wild trout fisheries and native trout populations.

The **California Heritage Trout Program** was established in 1998 to highlight restoration and angling opportunities specifically for native trout. This program results from an amendment of the Commission's Wild Trout policy to include designation of Heritage Trout waters — streams or lakes that feature one or more of the state's tremendous diversity of native trout.

California is home to about a dozen different kinds of cutthroat, golden, rainbow, and redband trout. However, many of these trout have experienced long-term declines and three are currently listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. A fourth species, the bull trout of the McCloud River drainage, is already extinct.

The Department is committed to restoring our native trout. A key feature of the California Heritage Trout Program will be education and outreach concerning native trout conservation. The objectives of this new program are to: (1) expand angling diversity by renewing and increasing opportunities to fish for a variety of California native trout; (2) inform and educate anglers and the public about the importance of native trout and their habitats; (3) build public support for programs to restore depleted native trout populations; and (4) solicit public participation in restoration projects.

Heritage and Wild Trout Program coordination is organized under the Wildlife and Inland Fisheries Division, Fisheries Programs Branch.

Those wishing to know more about the Heritage and Wild Trout Programs may visit our website, which is linked to the Department of Fish and Game website, www.dfg.ca.gov, or contact the Heritage and Wild Trout staff at 916 358-2845.



Hot Creek in Mono County.